



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

Opening Statement of Rep. James Comer (R-KY), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services Hearing:
"Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness"
July 16, 2019

"There are few aspects of a child's development as influential as the home they grow up in. For homeless and runaway youth there are devastating dangers and risks that can compromise their safety and health. Sadly, reports indicate that in the United States around 700,000 youth are without homes. Congress reauthorized the *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act* (RHYA) in 2018, which helps continue efforts to prevent childhood homelessness and rescue youth runaways.

RHYA's three main programs offer crisis intervention such as temporary shelter, counseling, and family unification for runaway and homeless youth. Additionally, the programs support community-based organizations that provide homeless youth with stable and safe longer-term housing. RHYA also funds outreach and education programs for runaway and homeless youth who have been subjected to serious trauma, like sexual abuse and human trafficking. This work is lifesaving for young Americans facing homelessness.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which we will hear from today, also helps save and protect missing youth, including runaway youth. The center's work is just one example of the multifaceted effort to protect children. By engaging with corporations, law enforcement, non-profit organizations, and families, NCMEC also helps bring kids back home. Increasingly, children cared for by the state are running away, ending up homeless. Although we'll hear today that there has been improved coordination among agencies to help locate these kids and get them back home, there is still more work that can be done.

There isn't a simple solution for youth homelessness. Children leave home for a lot of reasons -- some run from abuse but others are lured by predators looking to harm children. That is why we need to help the folks on the ground -- the people we will hear from today -- to do their jobs.

Our children are this country's most valuable asset. They are also the most vulnerable in our society. As lawmakers, we must help protect American youth from homelessness and the dangers it presents. Today's hearing will give us an opportunity to learn more about the programs serving our runaway and homeless youth. I look forward to the testimony from all our witnesses."

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